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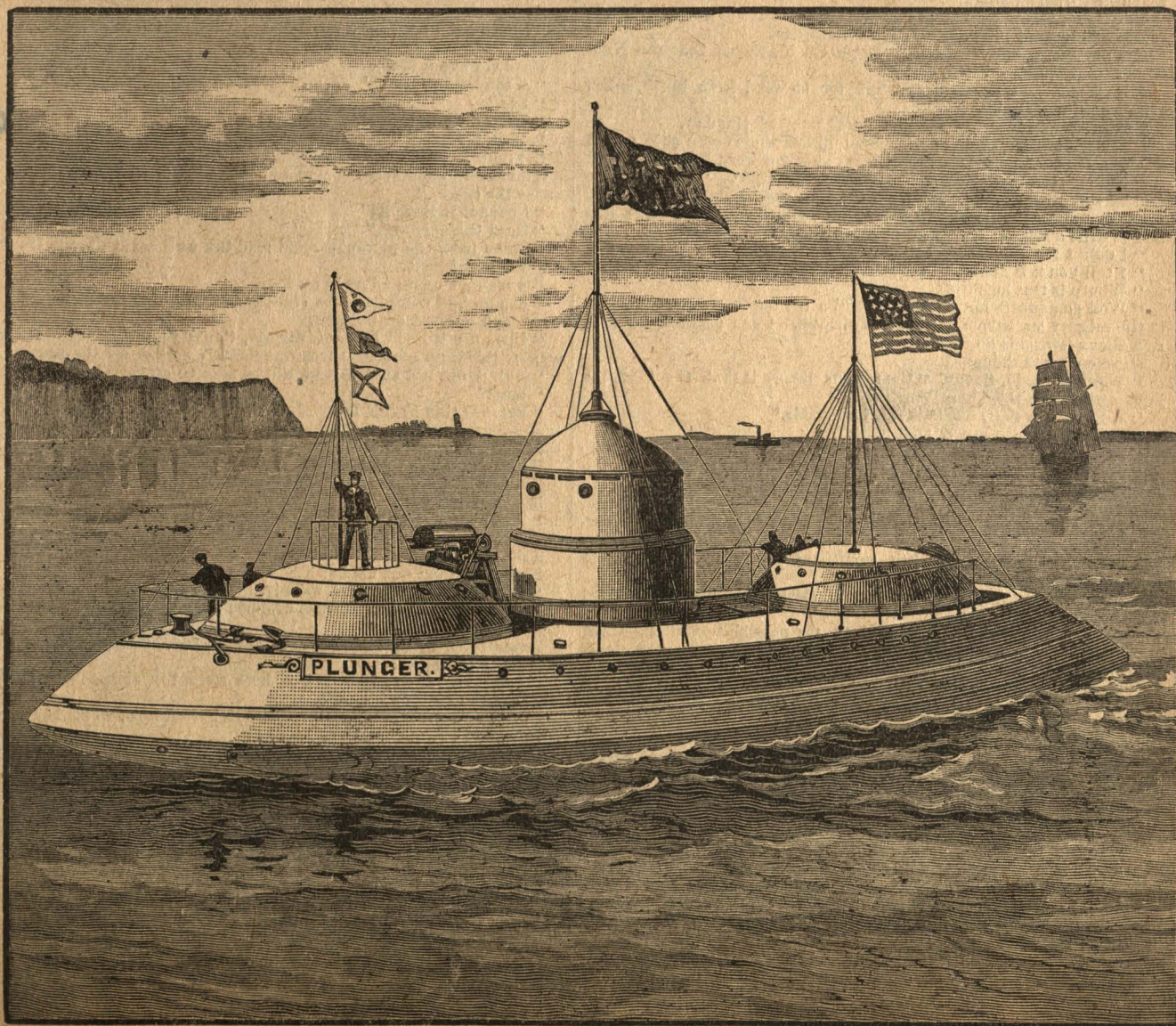
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SIX WEEKS IN THE GREAT WHIRLPOOL; OR, STRANGE ADVENTURES IN A SUBMARINE BOAT.

By "NONAME."



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SIX WEEKS IN THE GREAT WHIRLPOOL:

OR, STRANGE ADVENTURES IN A SUBMARINE BOAT.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Search for a Sunken Ship," "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Chase Through the Clouds," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS LOSS OF THE NAUTILUS.

THE fine ship Nautilus, owned by a wealthy New York firm, had sailed from Liverpool for New York in mid-winter, and had failed to reach port when expected.

Weeks passed into months, and all hopes of ever seeing the overdue vessel were abandoned.

Her loss was a great blow to the shipping firm.

More than that, many a sad heart waited in vain for the safe homecoming of friends and dear ones who had taken passage aboard her. They were destined in all belief never to see them again alive.

The newspapers published an account of the loss of the Nautilus.

The one conclusion was arrived at that she had gone down in a storm, with all on board.

Of course, this was a natural acceptance, but it did not satisfy one of the members of the firm, Mr. Walter Hayden.

His partner, Oliver Hitchcock, laughed at his theory that the Nautilus might yet be afloat.

"How can you possibly account for no word from her?" asked Hitchcock, skeptically.

"How could you get word from her?" retorted Hayden.

"If she has been adrift in the ocean all this while some ship would have hailed her, and we should at least have got word from her."

"Not necessarily," declared the senior partner. "Perhaps she has all this while drifted away from the tracks of passing ships. You must remember that there are parts of the North Atlantic where one might drift about for years and never see a sail."

"I doubt that."

"I tell you it is not at all impossible."

"Where is that locality?"

"Well somewhere not so very far from the upper coast of Norway is the mighty maelstrom or Great Whirlpool. I can assure you that nowadays few ships go there."

Hitchcock was thoughtful.

"Well," he said, finally, "then your theory is that the Nautilus is somewhere in the Great Whirlpool?"

"I do not say that, but it is not impossible."

"Ships have been lost in that spot."

"Certainly."

"Moreover, Captain Pitcher's course always extends quite to the north. It is not impossible, as you say, that a storm may have driven the Nautilus into the maelstrom."

"Now you are talking sense, Hitchcock. I wish we could ascertain beyond a doubt."

The discussion dropped at this point, and was not resumed again for some days.

But it was soon very apparent that Hitchcock had become imbued with some of his partner's ideas.

In fact, so deeply did he delve into the possibilities of the thing that one day he came into the office, and seating himself at the desk, said brusquely:

"Hayden, I want to talk with you."

"All right," replied the senior member. "What about?"

"The Nautilus."

"Indeed!"

"I have been thinking quite seriously upon the subject, and I have come to the conclusion that it would be by no means a bad idea to make search for the Nautilus."

Hayden smiled eagerly.

"You mean visit the maelstrom?"

"Yes."

"But how will you do that?"

"Ah, that I cannot easily say. Of course a sailing vessel once within the powerful current is lost. It will not do to venture there with such. Even a steamer in the powerful waters of the vortex would be helpless."

"You are right. If the Nautilus has been thus long in the whirlpool, I fear she has long since gone down."

"Perhaps not. It has been said that ships have been for twelve months in the current fighting against it, and finally escaped with the aid of a gale."

Hope shone upon the faces of the partners.

"The Nautilus is a stanch vessel."

"Captain Pitcher is an able man."

"Yes."

Both were for some moments plunged in deep thought.

"But really," said Hitchcock, finally, "I think we can rescue the ship and crew."

Hayden looked dubious.

"I don't see how we can do it!" he declared. "We must perforce invade the current of the maelstrom in some way. Once there, why would we not be as powerless as the Nautilus?"

Hitchcock drew a newspaper from his pocket.

"I have been reading a very wonderful account here of a submarine boat," he declared.

Hayden gave a start.

"A submarine boat?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it is very interesting account of a young American inventor, Frank Reade, Jr., of Readestown. He has actually constructed a remarkable submarine boat in which he is able to travel anywhere under the ocean."

"I cannot believe it!"

"Read the account."

Hayden took the newspaper and read the authentic description of the wonderful boat.

His manner changed as he read.

When he had completed the reading his face was the picture of interest and deepest enthusiasm.

"Upon my word!" he cried, eagerly, "this is our chance. Let us employ this man with his submarine boat to search for the Nautilus."

"Ah! I am not sure that we will be able to do this!"

"Why?"

"Because this Frank Reade, Jr., is a very wealthy man, richer even than we are, and money would be no object to him to undertake so hazardous an experiment."

Hayden arose from his chair.

His face had a determined expression.

He consulted his watch.

"Frank Hitchcock!" he said, tersely, "I am going to take the four twenty train for Readestown. I shall visit Mr. Reade and see what I can do with him."

Hitchcock held out his hand.

"Good for you!" he said, warmly. "I hope you will succeed!"

In due course of time Hayden dropped from the train in the Readestown station.

Readestown was a beautiful little city, at the junction of two rivers flowing to the sea.

It had many fine residences and here were the shops and machine works of the famous inventor.

Here were constructed all the wonderful machines, which had made the name of Frank Reade, Jr., famous.

It was an easy matter for the visitor to find his way to the Reade works.

He applied at the gate and sent in his card:

MR. HAYDEN,
HITCHCOCK & HAYDEN,
New York City.

Presently the messenger returned and said:

"Mr. Reade will see you, sir, in his audience room."

Hayden entered the yard and crossed to a door in a long addition to the main building which was of brick.

Here he was ushered into a room some twenty feet square, and which was richly furnished.

Upon the walls were hung various curious models and drawings. The very atmosphere of the room savored of inventive genius.

The shipowner sank into a chair.

In a few moments a door opened, and a young man of striking appearance came in.

He was tall and rather slender, with a wonderful type of features, handsome yet resolute in their cast.

His head was of wonderful formation, showing great mental force. The light in his eyes was deep and serious, though when his face was lit up by a smile their expression was dazzling.

In the largest crowd Frank Reade, Jr., would have been noticeable.

There was that about him which greatly distinguished him from other men.

Hayden experienced a peculiar sense of awe for a moment, but this quickly vanished as the young inventor extended his hand pleasantly.

"I am delighted to see you, sir. Pray accept a seat."

Hayden complied at once.

"The object of my visit, Mr. Reade," he said, without delay or hesitation, "is to confer with you upon a subject of the utmost importance to our firm."

"Indeed!" said Frank. "In what manner can I serve you?"

"First, let me tell you of a heavy loss which we incurred not long since."

"Very well!"

"It was the failure to return to port of one of our best ships, the Nautilus. She has been overdue six months."

"From what port?" asked Frank, with some interest.

"Liverpool!"

"Was she not spoken for any vessel?"

"She has never been seen or heard from since leaving the English coast."

"She is probably at the bottom of the sea."

"It may be so. Yet myself and my partner have dared to hope that she is still afloat somewhere upon the ocean."

Frank Reade, Jr., was silent for a moment.

He appeared to be doing some deep thinking upon the subject.

When finally he raised his head, he said slowly:

"My dear sir, I do not desire to say anything to depress your hopes, but I much fear that they are illusive."

Hayden changed his position and at once adopted argument.

"Will you kindly listen to a few reasons for our apparently foolish belief?" he asked, intently.

"I will."

"And I am not encroaching upon your valuable time?"

"Proceed! I shall be interested!"

This settled the question.

Hayden at once continued:

"The Nautilus is not the first vessel sailing much the same course, to disappear in this mysterious manner. Not the least trace of any such has been found. The usual conclusion has been that they have foundered at sea."

Frank inclined his head.

"I realize the force of that assertion," he said.

"Now, myself and my partner have deeply studied the matter, and we have come to the conclusion that such an hypothesis is not wholly correct."

"Ah!"

"Of course we recognize the North Atlantic as a stormy and rough ocean, but has no destroyer of commerce equal to the South Pacific typhoon or hurricane. Yet more vessels are lost mysteriously than in any other part of the maritime world."

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT WHIRLPOOL DISCUSSED.

"Is it not because more vessels travel the seas between here and Europe?" asked Frank, casually.

"I believe not. I have been aboard our ships in the roughest of North Atlantic storms. They have always gallantly weathered them."

"What then do you believe is the real cause of this mysterious disappearance of ships?"

"Now we near the real point of this discussion. My partner and I have discussed the matter thoroughly. First I will ask you a question."

"Well?"

"You have doubtless heard of the great whirlpool?"

Frank Reade, Jr., gave a start.

"I have," he replied.

An inkling of the other's meaning began to dawn upon him.

"I believe," resumed Hayden, "that many of the vessels which so mysteriously disappear at sea really are caught in the waters of that mighty maelstrom."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, with deep interest. "I must admit that there is logic in your remarks. But is not the course of Atlantic vessels generally far removed from the locality of the whirlpool?"

"Not more than seven or eight hundred miles. A protracted storm might drive a vessel right into the current of the maelstrom."

"That may be. But how about this great whirlpool? Have you ever seen it, and does it really exist? I believe there are many sailors who discredit its existence, or at least its power to hold a ship in its midst."

"Its existence is an undisputed fact," said Hayden. "I have seen its outer current, and know that many ships have disappeared in it."

"And you believe that the Nautilus is in its clutches?"

"I am not sure of that. It is only a theory."

"It may be well based," said Frank, thoughtfully, "but may I ask, in what manner can I assist you in determining the problem?"

Hayden changed his position.

He gazed straight at Frank, and said:

"Mr. Reade, I understand that you are the inventor of a submarine boat?"

Frank returned his gaze.

"I am," he replied, quietly.

"Is it really a fact that you are able to travel anywhere under the ocean with it?"

"It is."

Hayden rose from his seat.

"That is wonderful!" he declared. "I can scarcely conceive of its possibility."

"It is not only a possibility, but a fact," replied Frank.

"Wonderful! Indeed—I—that is—well, let us not beat about the bush any further," cried the merchant, bluntly. "The object of my visit, Mr. Reade, I may as well tell you flatly, is to endeavor to induce you to aid us with your submarine boat in determining the fate of the Nautilus."

Frank was silent for a moment. The two men stood facing each other. Each thoroughly understood the other. Frank saw before him a man deeply interested in the carrying trade of the sea and anxious to know the fate of his missing ship.

Hayden recognized in the young inventor one who had the power to help him to gain his desires.

But it was not a question to be decided so quickly.

The young inventor was not one to plunge headlong into an enterprise.

There were many things first to be considered.

So after a moment's mature deliberation, he extended his hand to Hayden, and said pleasantly:

"I will entertain your request, sir, and give you an early answer!"

Hayden grasped his hand warmly.

"Thank you a thousand times!" he cried. "You are very kind, sir. If pay is an object I can say—"

But a warning light shone in Frank Reade, Jr.'s, eyes.

"I shall not perform the service for monetary remuneration!" he replied. "I think quite likely, it may be a matter deeply of interest to science, to determine the existence and the character of the maelstrom."

Hayden bowed low.

"I shall hope to hear from you favorably, Mr. Reade!" he said.

"You shall hear at an early day."

"I am consumed with curiosity in regard to your submarine boat!"

"Indeed!" said Frank, warmly. "Would you not like to take a look at her?"

"That would be a great happiness."

"Come this way!"

Eagerly Hayden followed Frank Reade, Jr., out of the model room. Across several spacious yards, inclosed by high brick walls, they passed.

Then they came to a large and deep basin, walled in, with a canal leading out into the big river beyond.

"I have have just had the Plunger put into the water," said Frank.

"What do you think of her external appearance?"

Hayden could not reply.

He was consumed with wonderment and deep interest.

There, floating in the waters of the basin, was a craft the like of which he had never seen or heard of before.

She might have been a government torpedo boat, so far as her external appearance went.

But her character was far different.

Long and rakish in hull, she sat upon the water like a duck.

Her hull was composed of lightly rolled and finest tempered steel plates.

Her deck was hardly ten feet above the water line, and was protected by a rail which extended all around the craft.

In the bow or forward, was a dome-shaped turret, with dead-eye windows of toughest plate glass. Aft was another of these, precisely the same.

Amidships was the main tower or turret, rising high above the others.

In this there was a vestibuled door or entrance, which will be described more fully later on.

In this central tower there were round windows, and a series of oblong spaces covered with glass, for the purpose of observation by the pilot.

A mast rose from the center of each turret, with a number of flags flaunting in the air.

The Plunger looked natty and ship-shape externally.

This Hayden admitted.

But the most wonderful part of the invention was yet to be revealed to him.

At this moment two men came along the pier.

One was a short, diminutive negro, as black as ebony.

The other was a broad-shouldered Irishman, with a shock of red hair, and as comical a mug as ever was seen.

Even before Frank Reade, Jr., spoke, Hayden guessed who these characters were, for they were hardly less famous than the wonderful inventor himself.

"Barney and Pomp!" cried Frank, authoritatively, "I want to go

aboard the Plunger. Just heave a hawser over the end of the wharf, and run out a plank."

In an instant the two men started to obey.

"A'right, sah," said the negro.

"Begorra, we will, sor," replied the Irishman in a rich brogue.

The hawser was quickly thrown, and in the act Barney contrived to splash a bucket of water into Pomp's face.

"Wha' fo' yo' do dat, yo' fool l'ishman!" cried the incensed dorky.

"Begorra, it's only a second baptism fer yez!" said the Celt.

"I brek yo' head fo' dat, I'ish!"

"Yez ain't able."

The two servitors were continually hazing each other, with the odds in favor of neither. It was likely that they would have now indulged in a genuine ruction had it not been for Frank Reade, Jr.

"Hold on there, you rascals!" he cried, sharply. "No skylarking now, or I'll discharge both of you."

The two jokers subsided.

Hayden followed Frank aboard the vessel.

They crossed the deck and entered the vestibule.

Frank explained the mechanism of this.

"When under water," he said, "if we wanted to go outside, we have only to enter this vestibule from the cabin and close the door. Then admit the water from the outside and walk out. In entering the outside is shut, and the water is forced out of the vestibule by pneumatic pressure."

"We have improved diving suits, which we wear at such a time," he added, by way of explanation.

"Wonderful!" was all that Hayden could say.

Frank led the way into the center turret.

Here was quite a spacious apartment, richly furnished, and containing library, cases of books, and shelves, upon which rested nautical and scientific instruments.

Maps and charts lay upon a table.

"This is the captain's room!" said Frank.

Just above this in the upper turret and reached by a ladder was the pilot-house and compass.

Passing from this, the two men went into the main cabin, half of which was below the water line.

This was spacious and magnificently furnished.

Several fine staterooms adjoined it.

Then aft into the smaller turret they went.

Here the visitor beheld a wonderful sight, namely all the electrical machinery which gave the vessel its motive power.

Everything was nicely adjusted and skillfully arranged, the result of an immense amount of brain work.

Then forward Frank led his visitor to the forward turret.

Here was the vast chamber or reservoir, by means of which the Plunger rose and sank.

By the opening of various slides this was instantly filled with water which enabled the vessel to sink.

The ejection of the water by sliding partitions operated by powerful pneumatic pressure created the necessary air-chamber to make the Plunger spring again to the surface as light as a cork.

This completed the rounds of the submarine boat.

Hayden was vastly pleased, though upon one point he was yet somewhat mystified.

"How is it that you obtain air for breathing purposes?" he asked.

Frank stepped to the cabin partition and indicated one of hundreds of little valves.

"These are fed by chemically prepared oxygen, fresh and pure," he replied. "The air in the Plunger is never in danger of being vitiated, as a complete circulation is kept up by these."

On deck once more, Hayden was shown a powerful search-light, capable of throwing a flash of light five miles.

Then once more on the pier the two men faced each other.

"Well," said Frank, "what do you think of the Plunger?"

Hayden drew a deep breath.

"I have not words with which to express my admiration," he declared.

Frank was pleased.

"I consider the Plunger the crowning triumph of my life," he said.

"You are a wonderful man."

Frank laughed at this.

"No flattery," he said.

"That is sincere. Oh, now I can only express my one hope!"

"I can guess what that is," said Frank, with sudden resolution.

"And we may as well come to the point at once, Mr. Hayden."

The ship owner's face lengthened.

"I have just put the Plunger into commission," continued Frank, "and was intending to take some sort of a deep sea trip. Indeed, I can see nothing that offers more of interest or inducement than to agree to your proposition, and undertake to find the lost Nautilus in the Great Whirlpool."

A wild cry of joy escaped Hayden's lips.

He caught Frank's hand impulsively.

"God bless you!" he cried. "I have just one more favor to ask."

"And that—"

"May I accompany you on board the Plunger on that trip?"

"I see no reason why you may not," replied the young inventor.

CHAPTER III.

THE DETECTIVE.

A HAPPIER man than Hayden at that moment it would have been difficult to imagine.

He fairly embraced Frank in his eager joy.

Then he did a foolish thing.

He went at once and telegraphed Hitchcock the joyful news.

The latter in his excitement spread the report.

In a jiffy the newspapers had it, and it went all over the continent.

The subject was upon everybody's tongue and everybody was interested.

Two or three column articles upon the terrors of the maelstrom were eagerly read by the public.

The result of this in at least one instance led to beneficial results.

There had been one important reason for learning the fate of the Nautilus.

In the Tombs prison there languished a young man charged with the awful crime of murder.

The evidence seemed all against him, but yet many believed in his innocence.

Hardly a day after the report of the proposed trip of the Nautilus had spread a man called at Frank Reade, Jr.'s house.

His card read:

"ALLAN PINKHAM,
"Chief of Detectives."

Frank of course gave him an audience.

"I will be brief, Mr. Reade," said the visitor. "You can see by my card that I am a detective."

"I can," replied Frank. "In what manner can I serve you?"

"I will endeavor to show you. I am sure that you are a fair-minded man and would like to see justice done."

Frank bowed his head.

"That is true," he replied.

"Good! I understand that you are about to go in quest of the lost ship, the Nautilus?"

"I am!"

"Then let me tell you a story, upon listening to which I am sure you will accord your sympathy."

"Proceed!"

"One evening, not more than a year ago, two young men occupied the same room in a certain lodging house in the city of New York."

"Both were clerks in mercantile houses. They were warm friends until one fatal night they quarreled over a game of poker."

"Albert Dodge, one of them, accused Charles Haynes, the other, of cheating."

"It was to Haynes an unjust accusation, and they parted in anger."

"The result was that Haynes removed his effects to another part of the city, and from that moment terms of friendship ceased."

"Six months passed."

"Haynes was regular at his work, and in all this time had seen nothing whatever of his former room-mate."

"But one evening, going home from work, he had reached the corner of the Bowery and a street near the Cooper Union, when he heard a groan."

"He paused, and was thrilled to see the form of a man lying in the gutter."

"Many a person would have shrank from touching the unfortunate, believing no doubt that he was some drunken wretch, perhaps the victim of a contagious sickness."

"But Charles Haynes was a youth of tender heart, and he could not bear to think of a human being in such a plight."

"'He is probably sick!' he exclaimed, solicitously. 'Where is there an officer? Let some one call an ambulance.'"

"But, an unusual thing for such a well frequented thoroughfare, no officer or other person was in sight."

"What was to be done?"

"Again the man groaned."

"This was enough for Haynes. At once he stepped into the gutter."

"What is the matter, friend?" he asked, kindly. "Are you sick or hurt?"

"Then he lifted the unfortunate's head up in the light."

"As he did so he was given a stunning shock."

"The features were familiar to him."

"My God!" he gasped. "It is Albert Dodge! What has happened to you?"

"The injured man made a spasmodic effort to speak aloud."

"But his tongue failed him."

"He could only whisper:

"'Charlie, is it you? Oh, I have been terribly used! I am dying!'"

"God forbid!" cried Charlie, in horror. "Old friend, tell me how did it happen?"

"I—do not know. My strength is—going fast. Hold up my head. So! oh, Charlie, I am sorry I quarreled with you!"

"Don't mention that, Albert!" replied impulsive Charlie. "I was too quick!"

"And I was wrong. You did not cheat. It was a mistake, but I was too proud to own it."

"Let bygones be!" said Charles, "tell me how did you come here? Why, there is blood upon your face and—all over you. My God! the wound upon your head!"

"Yes—and a knife thrust in the back of my neck. I am going to die, Charley. A thug did it I think. He came up behind me, struck me down, rifled my pockets and fled."

"My God! that is awful!" cried Charles Haynes, wildly. "Bear up, Albert, I will call the police and an ambulance. Oh, you must live—"

"But the friend's sympathetic appeal was in vain."

"Albert Dodge died in that moment in his friend's arms.
"With horror and grief Charles was about to arise when his hand came in contact with the handle of the cruel knife yet buried in Dodge's neck.

"Some impulse prompted him with awful horror to pull it out.
"The blade came out, and the blood spurted over his hand and sleeve. He arose to his feet with his hand claspings the hilt.
"Fatal move! At that moment two officers and three civilians came down in the glare of the light.

"They saw him standing there with the knife in his hand. Blood was upon him, and he was convicted of murder then and there, though before God as innocent as an unborn babe."

The detective ceased speaking for a moment.

Frank Reade, Jr., had been listening with intense horror and interest.

"My God!" he gasped, "that is terrible. Is there no way to prove him innocent?"

"No way; save to find the real murderer."

"Cannot that be done?"

"Ah, there is the point! I think that it has been done!"

"Good! then the young man will be cleared."

The detective shook his head.

"I fear not."

"But why?"

"Now I draw near the object of my visit. Charles Haynes has been tried and convicted of the murder of Albert Dodge. It was proved that he had previously quarreled with Dodge, and this showed the motive."

"Well?"

"He is now awaiting his execution, which must take place in two months, unless the real murderer is found."

"Is it not possible—"

"Wait! Not but a few days before the sailing of the Nautilus, I received word from a colleague, Sam Hall, of Scotland Yard, that he had a man in hand, by the name of Black Billy Benton, whom he believed was the murderer of Albert Dodge. He expected to get a confession, and if he succeeded he would come to America with it at once. Black Billy was on his death bed."

"And did Hall get the confession?" asked Frank.

"I believe that he did, for I learn that he was one of the cabin passengers of the ill-fated Nautilus. If the ship has gone down then his body must be with her, and he has no doubt the necessary evidence with which to clear Charles Haynes. This is my story."

The detective ceased speaking.

Frank Reade, Jr., drew a long breath.

"Well!" he exclaimed, "I am much interested in this affair, Mr. Pinkham, I can assure you. I think I understand now why you have come to see me."

"You are going in quest of the Nautilus?"

"Yes."

"Then I have a request to make."

"Well?"

"If it is within your power, procure from Hall, or from his body, the papers necessary to clear poor Haynes."

Frank held out his hand.

The detective gripped it.

"I have always declared in favor of justice and fair play," he declared. "I will certainly heed your wishes."

"I thank you."

Both men arose.

Pinkham walked to the door.

At the threshold he paused.

"I shall await with anxiety word from you," he said. "You can address me at the Tombs prison."

"Very well," replied Frank. "I hope to give favorable news."

"Good-day!"

The door closed, and Allan Pinkham, detective, was gone.

Frank was about to touch a bell push button when there was a light rap on the door.

"Come in!" he said.

The door opened. A man stood upon the threshold.

He was certainly a peculiar looking individual. Frank gazed hard at him.

He was about sixty years of age, with white hair and beard, and wore immense goggles. His dress was rather slouchy, and he wore a broad-brimmed hat. Yet there was an air about him which betokened him a man of learning.

"Well," said the young inventor, with a grim smile of recognition, "it is you, Prof. Bookworm. What can I do for you?"

The professor bowed low.

"Good-day, Mr. Reade," he said, in a queer, piping voice. "I have come to see you upon an important matter."

"What is it?"

"The Geographical and Submarine Research Societies have appointed me to confer with you upon the question of my accompanying you upon your trip to the maelstrom in the interests of science."

CHAPTER IV.

UNDER WAY.

The professor took off his goggles and wiped them coolly. Frank Reade, Jr., arose and went to a shelf in a corner and took down a book.

He consulted it a moment, and then said:

"Barney and Pomp will accompany me, also Mr. Hayden."

"Hayden? Who is he?" asked Bookworm, sharply.

"He is the owner of the Nautilus."

"The dickens you say! Is nobody else going?"

"No."

"Then why cannot I go?"

"Let me see your credentials."

Prof. Bookworm pulled a great pile of documents from his pocket.

"Here they are," he said.

Frank glanced over them.

He saw that it was true that the Submarine Research Society had indeed indorsed the scientist.

An impulse caused him to reply:

"Very well, Bookworm. In the interests of science I shall accept you."

The aged scientist gave a gasping cry of joy.

He would have embraced Frank if he had been allowed.

"God bless you, for a whole-hearted man!" he cried, happily. "Ah, this will be a great thing for science!"

Frank now touched the push button.

A bell tinkled in the shop beyond.

In a few moments Barney came in.

"What will yez have, Mистер Frank?" he asked, in his rich brogue.

"Barney, I want you and Pomp to put the Plunger all in readiness for a prompt start for the whirlpool. You know what is needed."

"All roight, sor!"

The Celt ducked his head and went out.

Then Frank turned to Bookworm.

"Are you ready to go?"

"All my worldly belongings are in that green bag," admitted the professor. "I may say, sir, that I am."

"Very good!"

Frank walked out of the yard and down the street.

He came to a telegraph office, where he wrote the following dispatch:

"WALTER HAYDEN—HAYDEN & HITCHCOCK, New York City:—
"The Plunger will be ready to start Thursday at noon. Be sure to be on hand."
FRANK READE, JR."

In an hour an answer came back:

"FRANK READE, JR., Readestown, U. S. A.:—I shall leave for your place to-night. I am sure of success."
WALTER HAYDEN."

True to his word, Hayden appeared at the appointed time.

Exactly at noon, Thursday, the Plunger was ready, and her passengers were on board.

It was a critical moment.

The submarine boat was about to begin its remarkable visit to the Great Whirlpool.

A large crowd had assembled to see the vessel off.

There was cheering and waving of flags as the Plunger moved out of the basin and into the river.

The mighty trip was begun, and soon the Plunger left Readestown behind.

Down the broad river she went, and in due course came to the sea.

Everybody on board was in high spirits. Frank did not at once send the Plunger to the bottom, but held her out to sea.

Very little of her could be seen above the water as she moved along except her flags and the turrets.

But, meeting a war vessel, a salute was fired, the other evidently fancying that she was a torpedo boat or something of the sort.

A good laugh was had at the expense of the man-of-war.

Then Frank slowed the engines and went to the indicator connected with the sounding lines, and found that they were in water barely twenty fathoms deep.

Satisfied that the Plunger would stand a much greater pressure than that, Frank cried:

"All hands below! I am going to send her down."

Everybody scrambled for quarters below.

Either in the cabin or the pilot-house they sought safety.

Frank touched a spring which caused every hatch and outer door to hermetically close.

This also turned on the oxygen generator.

Then he pressed another key, which threw open the reservoir tubes.

In a twinkling it was filled and the Plunger began to sink.

Down she went steadily.

At any stage Frank could have checked her and proceeded on his way under water.

But he was desirous of descending to the bottom.

So he allowed her to go down.

In a few moments there was a slight shock and all motion ceased.

All had been pitchy darkness.

But now Frank pressed another lever, which turned on the electric lights.

For a moment all were dazzled.

Then looking through the heavy plate glass windows they beheld most wonderful sights.

They were at the bottom of the sea.

Strange and wonderful was the scene spread before them.

Frank had sent the powerful rays of the search-light through the waters far and wide.

The bottom of the ocean here consisted of wide sand-bars and huge kelp strewn rocks.

There were ocean caves and reefs of coral of various colors, all sorts of strange marine plants.

Fishes of every size, hue and description swam about leisurely. They came up to the glass windows without any trace of fear, and bumped quite socially against the glass with their noses. Ever and anon a huge shark or a lordly dolphin would flash by. Then there would be a scurrying of the smaller hordes of fish. To escape the capacious maws of their foes seemed the one aim of their existence.

Prof. Bookworm was almost beside himself with excitement. He walked up and down excitedly, made hundreds of notes in a voluminous book.

Then suddenly acting upon inspiration, he rushed upon Frank. "Oh, my dear boy," he cried, excitedly, "there is a rare specimen of coral that I want very badly. Cannot some one put a diving suit and get it?"

Frank looked at the scientist inscrutably. "Pshaw!" he cried. "Don't you know better than that, man? That shark will surely have you."

"The shark!" said Bookworm, incredulously looking out into the water.

As luck had it, a huge shark at that moment flashed by the window.

He was a monster, and his keen jaws of shining teeth and his lightning quickness were plainly to be seen.

Prof. Bookworm dropped his note-book and his sandy hair fairly stood on end.

"Shades of Nineveh!" he gasped. "What in the name of Nero was that?"

"Why, it was a shark," laughed Frank, "the water is alive with them here!"

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, I do! If there were not so many of them we would venture out. But it is not safe."

"By no means!" agreed the horrified professor, "but that specimen of coral would be worth a hundred dollars to our society."

"Never mind!" said Frank, "we shall find more and better!"

"I doubt it!"

After some little time spent in this place, and after all had become accustomed to remaining under water, Frank said:

"Well, let us stay here no longer, I think we had better go on."

Walter Hayden had been impatiently walking the cabin. He had no thoughts for anything else than the mighty maelstrom.

"I agree to that!" he cried. "I think the sooner we reach the whirlpool the better."

Nobody demurred, and Frank allowed the Plunger to go ahead. They were now traveling under water, and this was attended by no little risk.

There was danger of striking some obstruction, or, perchance, of running into the side of some submarine cliff or mountain peak.

The topography of the bottom of the sea is much the same as that of the land.

There are mountains and hills and valleys, all possessing some remarkable feature.

Many valleys were overgrown with vast miles of standing sea plants, some blossoming in most brilliant colors.

There were plains of sand as vast as the Sahara, where shell fish of the most beautiful kinds abounded.

Coral caves and reefs, with vines of all shades and lengths and forests of coral trees.

Indeed it would require volumes to describe all the wonders seen by the voyagers.

Ever and anon the remains of a sunken ship would be seen, gone to rotting decay.

We will not attempt to depict all this to the reader.

Let us rather pass on to the stirring incidents with which they met. For several days the Plunger traveled thus under the sea.

Stops were made and various specimens recovered for Prof. Bookworm.

But after a time the long, level plain of the Central Atlantic was reached and her progress was very rapid.

There were few obstructions and the search-light easily located these.

Sometimes when near the surface the rays of the search-light were sent upwards through the water and reflected against the dome of the sky.

Passengers on several different steamers observed this.

The result was that upon their arrival in port a thrilling account was rendered of the peculiar phenomena of a strange light which at intervals flashed from the depths of the sea.

By some scientists it was explained as the action of a vast bed of phosphorous there deposited, or possibly a shoal of luminous fish, which were known to exist.

Others suggested smoldering fires, but how these could exist under the bed of the ocean they did not attempt to explain.

Meanwhile, the Plunger was making rapid progress toward her destination.

All on board were now eager to reach the whirlpool.

Once Frank allowed the boat to arise to the surface, and reported that after taking bearings they were hardly five hundred miles from their destination.

This was most encouraging, and the spirits of all were high.

Thus far the voyage had been a complete success.

There seemed no reason why it should not result satisfactorily to all concerned.

If the Nautilus was found, then this would become a certain fact.

CHAPTER V.

THE DRIFTING SHIP.

BARNEY and Pomp had enjoyed the voyage thus far in their own peculiar way.

They were a very social pair, and never at a loss for diversion when together.

Indeed, their betters could well afford to descend to their quarters occasionally and listen to their entertainment.

This consisted of songs and dances and banjo playing by Pomp.

Barney played the fiddle in true Irish style, and could rattle off a jig or a ballad in true Hybernian style.

"Indeed, the trip would be monotonous but for Barney and Pomp," declared Hayden. "They are a concert troupe entire."

"They are remarkable specimens of their kind," affirmed Prof. Bookworm, who looked at them in the light of the scientist and student of anthropology.

But Barney and Pomp, though fond of a gay time, never neglected their duties.

Work first and play afterwards was ever their motto.

Frank Reade, Jr., was of a genial disposition himself, and never frowned upon any attempt of the two servitors to make things lively.

Thus the trip was so far attended only by pleasant incidents.

Within five hundred miles of the Great Whirlpool it would not seem a difficult thing to very shortly reach it.

The Plunger was capable of easily making one hundred miles per day under water.

And when they were quite near the whirlpool Frank concluded that it would be just as well to travel on the surface.

So he sent the Plunger up from the depths, and the submarine voyagers once more traveled in the light of day.

The oxygen generators were given a rest, and the hermetically sealed doors of the boat were opened.

This admitted the first breath of real air furnished by Nature that they had had in two weeks.

All scrambled for the deck, and it truly seemed good to once more have the sunlight and the world spread before their gaze.

"The bottom of the sea is a very wonderful and a very strange place!" declared Walter Hayden, "but I should not care to remain there always."

Frank had been studying the horizon closely with a glass.

He now gave a sharp exclamation.

Hayden, who was near him, heard it.

"What is it, Frank?" he asked.

The young inventor handed him the glass.

"Do you see a sail away off yonder?" he asked.

The young ship owner took the glass and studied the distant object.

"Yes," he said, "it is certainly a white sail."

"There is a ship off there."

"Yes."

"Do you know what that means?"

"I really do not."

"How far off is it?"

"Twenty miles."

"It is further."

"Perhaps so. Call it thirty, then. Is not that too far?"

"It is all of that," declared Frank, positively. "You cannot see it with the naked eye, and that is good evidence."

"Indeed, you are right."

"Well, now to the point. If that ship is thirty miles distant it is then right in the outer circle of the Great Whirlpool!"

Hayden was astonished.

"Do you mean to say that we are as near to the whirlpool as that?" he gasped.

"I do!"

"And yonder—but I cannot believe it!"

"You shall very soon see."

"And—do you think it can be possible that that ship is the Nautilus?"

"No," replied Frank, with a laugh. "It is not at all likely that it is. The Nautilus would be deeper in the maelstrom."

"Let us go forward quickly."

"We will."

The speed of the Plunger was increased.

Every moment they drew nearer to the ship.

Soon the Plunger began to take on a peculiar motion.

Then it did not require a keen eye to see a strange action of the waters.

They did not seem to rise and fall in tossing waves in the ordinary manner.

But there was a peculiar swelling motion and a swashing sort of current. A light object, such as a cork, thrown overboard would recede rapidly to the westward.

"Do you see that?" cried Frank, triumphantly. "We are now in the outer and insidious sweep of the maelstrom."

"You don't mean it?" exclaimed Hayden, in amazement.

"Yes, I do. Watch the motion of the water and you will see that peculiar whirling motion. It is a powerful current and would carry us on, growing faster all the while until at length the final vortex would be reached."

"So the maelstrom is really a fact?" said Hayden, in deep wonderment. "Well, I am badly beat. I can see how a sailing vessel could get caught in this powerful tide and unfavorably by strong winds be unable to get out of it until in the swifter current."

Prof. Bookworm stood near.

He had been studying the phenomenon himself very closely.

"It is certainly a wonderful action of Nature's forces," he declared.

"Truly the vessel so unfortunate as to get into the clutches of this monster is doomed."

"No doubt then," said Hayden, "many a good ship has gone to her doom in this current."

"Of course," replied Frank. "Well, my friends, let us see if we cannot hail yonder ship."

A signal flag was run up on the mainmast of the Plunger.

At first the distant vessel did not see it.

Then she answered.

A white flag fluttered at her mast head.

She was seen to heave to.

The Plunger at once shot forward toward her.

Frank Reade, Jr., stood on the main deck, and as the Plunger drew nearer he saw that the vessel was one of the merchant build.

She had been vainly tacking and trying to get out of the clutches of the powerful current.

But it seemed to hold her, and all efforts were in vain.

As the Plunger drew nearer the rail of the vessel was seen to be thronged with sailors.

Frank allowed the Plunger to approach within speaking distance.

Then he went out on deck.

"Boat ahoy!" came the hail from the ship's deck.

"Ahoy!" replied Frank.

"What craft is that?"

"The Plunger, submarine boat."

"Submarine boat?"

"Yes."

"What in the name of Neptune is that? Some new fangled government torpedo boat, I suppose?"

"No," replied Frank, "the Plunger is just what I tell you, a submarine boat. What ship is that?"

"The Sachem of Portland, Maine, U. S. A."

"What is your trouble?"

"That is what we don't know. We are in some kind of an ocean current and have been fighting against it for four days now but can't get one way nor t'other."

"Do you know what this current means?"

"No."

"You are in the outer circle of the Great Whirlpool."

A great cry of horror and dismay came from the deck of the Sachem.

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I do!"

"Then we'll never get out of it. They say a ship once in the clutches of the maelstrom can never escape."

"It may be so! However, I am going to try to save you."

"Are not you in the same box?"

"Not exactly. My boat is run by electric power and we are not yet so deep in the current but that we can overcome it."

A shout of joy went up from the deck of the Sachem.

This was evidently pleasing news to them.

Frank now allowed the Plunger to run up quite close to the side of the ship.

The captain, a tall bearded fellow, stood by the rail.

He descended to the Plunger's deck and shook hands with Frank.

He gave his name as Andrew Clark, and seemed to be a genial good-tempered fellow.

He was wonderstruck with the Plunger and its appointments.

"Well, I never!" he exclaimed in sheer amazement. "I never seen a craft like this one afore. And you mean to say that she will travel under water as well as above?"

"Yes," replied Frank.

"How can it be?"

"I will show you."

With which Frank proceeded to show the fellow the workings of the Plunger in detail.

To say that he was interested would be a mild statement of the truth.

While below in the cabin Frank suddenly pressed a key which rang an alarm gong.

Instantly those on deck rushed into the cabin.

Then Frank pressed another key which closed the hermetically sealed doors of the boat.

Then the Plunger began to sink.

For a moment all was darkness.

Captain Clark was panic-stricken.

"Thunder!" he roared. "We are sinking!"

"That is all right!" cried Frank. "Do not fear."

Then the electric lights flashed forth.

There was a gentle shock, and the Plunger rested on the bottom of the ocean.

The plate glass windows were relieved of their shutters, and a good view of the ocean bed could be had.

It was certainly a wondrous scene.

Captain Clark had never seen the like of it before.

He gazed upon it with amazement akin to awe.

"Then we are really at the bottom of the ocean?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Frank. "We are full fifty fathoms from the surface."

"Thunder and guns! Where do we get the air we breathe?"

Frank explained the use of the generators.

The captain listened attentively and then said:

"Enough! just take me to the surface once more. Really, sir, you are the most wonderful man in the world and you have the most wonderful boat!"

Frank laughed and pressed the lever which caused the reservoir to close.

Instantly the Plunger began to ascend.

When she reached the surface she was a hundred yards distant from the Sachem.

The Plunger had been under the water but about ten minutes.

CHAPTER VI.

OUT OF THE MAELSTROM.

Yet the crew of the Sachem were in a panic-stricken state.

It had seemed to them as if the vessel had sank for good.

They were not aware of the fact that she could sink and rise at pleasure.

They had believed their captain lost for a certainty.

Now, however, when the Plunger leaped up to view again, they were much excited and surprised.

Moreover, when the crew of the Plunger all appeared on deck, Captain Clark with them, they were even more amazed.

Indeed, so badly rattled was the captain of the Sachem, that he could hardly recover himself enough to thank Frank for his kind offer to tow them out of the maelstrom's current.

"And what, may I ask is your errand in these waters?" he asked Frank with curiosity.

"I am looking for a ship supposed to be lost in this current," replied Frank. "It is the Nautilus, of New York."

"The Nautilus!" replied Captain Clark. "Why, I saw that ship in Liverpool six months ago!"

"Did you?" exclaimed Hayden, with interest. "Then you have met Captain Pitcher?"

"I know him well!"

A lengthy conversation followed.

Captain Clark was able to throw much light upon the possible fate of the Nautilus.

"I agree with you," said Clark, "that it is hardly likely that the Nautilus was wrecked or lost at sea."

"She was a stanch vessel."

"Certainly. There is no doubt that she is now somewhere in this accursed current."

"Indeed I believe it."

"Captain Pitcher and I really had talk about taking this course home."

"Ah, you did?"

"Yes."

"That is enough!" cried Hayden, eagerly. "I will stake my life then that the Nautilus is in the current of the whirlpool!"

"We are certainly very glad to avail ourselves of your offer to tow us out into the open sea."

"We are glad to assist you."

As quickly as possible a tow line was laid.

The Plunger, though a light craft was a powerful one.

It easily towed the merchant ship.

For a good twenty miles the heavy current was battled with.

Then the Sachem lay over to the westward safe beyond the reach of the deadly maelstrom.

Salutes were exchanged, and the Sachem and the Plunger parted company.

The Plunger went back into the current of the great whirlpool.

All was excitement.

Hayden was the most indefatigable of all in the quest for a sail.

He had a firm belief that the Nautilus was yet drifting in the current of the whirlpool.

"As for the deadly vortex into which the ships are finally sucked," he declared, "I do not believe in it. It is my opinion that the ship in the clutches of the maelstrom floats on until the crew die of starvation and the rotting timbers finally sink!"

"Well!" said Frank, positively, "we will determine all that to a certainty before we return home."

"I certainly hope so."

"Have no fears on that score."

"Do you believe that the Plunger will be able to overcome the inner currents of the whirlpool?"

"We will proceed with caution and ascertain that fact."

And the young navigator proceeded on this plan.

There was no doubt but that the whirlpool was a most powerful current.

What caused it was an eternal mystery.

In vain Prof. Bookworm tried to fathom it.

He was obliged to acknowledge himself beaten upon every point.

There was occurring every moment incidents of great interest.

There was such a reflex action of the strange current, that objects once in its grasp seemed to lose their own power of volition.

Bits of wreckage, rotten spars, floating chests, and broken oars were encountered at intervals.

All were traveling in the same direction, which was pretty good evidence that they were in the maelstrom's current.

How many years they had been drifting thus it was hard to say.

Deeper into the current the Plunger now boldly went.

And at every step it seemed to grow more powerful until Barney and Pomp and even Frank himself became somewhat alarmed.

But Hayden and Prof. Bookworm were not at all concerned. The former's desire to learn the fate of the Nautilus overruled all else. The latter was so deeply interested in matters of science that fear did not enter into his being.

For several days the Plunger thus plowed through the current.

Then one night a strange phenomenon was witnessed.

Barney and Pomp were in the habit of dividing the watch.

One remained on deck the first half of the night and the latter the other half. This enabled one or the other to get needful sleep.

Upon the night in question it was Pomp's watch.

Barney was to relieve him at midnight.

It was a powerful dark night, and the search-light's glare easily showed a pathway of light for a mile ahead.

The course had been set and the wheel was lashed by Pomp, who, for some reason or other, was fearfully sleepy.

Never before in his life had the darky been guilty of the crime of sleeping at his post.

But he could no more overcome the sensation now than nothing at all.

He was obliged to succumb, and before he knew it, his senses had left him.

His head dropped upon his breast and he began to snore.

While the Plunger went on through the night with increased speed.

Of course, there was little danger of meeting ships in these waters.

If they were encountered, they would doubtless be floating wrecks or hulks.

But a collision with one of these would be most dangerous.

It was really a most perilous thing for Pomp to do.

But the darky was wholly a victim of the overpowering influence.

He slept soundly.

As luck would have it, however, the Plunger encountered no obstacle.

She sailed on evenly in a slightly heaving sea.

The midnight hour drew nearer.

Still Pomp slept.

Barney at the appointed hour was awakened by an electric alarm signal.

He crawled out of his bunk and hastily dressed himself.

"Arrah, an' it wud be foine to shlaape the rist av the noite!" he muttered, "but the naygur must have a chance!"

So the conscientious Celt crept up the cabin stairs and into the pilot-house.

And there to his astonishment he saw Pomp fast asleep.

"Tare an' 'ounds!" he gasped, "if the naygur ain't ashlaape. Well, I niver! Shure, it's the fust toime!"

Barney's first impulse was to arouse the darky.

But second thought influenced him differently.

"Be jabbers, an' wudn't Mither Frank be mad!" he muttered. "I've a moind to call him up. But, shure, it wudn't be fair."

Then a brilliant idea occurred to the Celt.

The mischievous element in his nature asserted itself.

"Begorra, it's a rare good chance for some fun!" he muttered. "On me wurrd I'll do it!"

Chuckling to himself Barney went to the electric table and connected a piece of wire with a disk.

This he placed close against the sole of one of Pomp's feet.

Then he connected the wire with an electric switch on the table.

He let on the current gradually until it began to work upon the nerves of the foot.

Pomp began to mutter in his sleep and moved a trifle.

Then Barney shut off the current.

The darky became calm.

As soon as he was satisfied that Pomp was deep enough in sleep, Barney repeated the operation.

Then he would chuckle in wildest glee.

"Shure, it'll be bad dreams he'll be afther having!" he muttered. "I'll give him a bit o' nightmare."

Certainly Pomp did not enjoy his sleep after that.

The more he muttered and tossed, the more Barney laughed.

But a turning of tables was at hand.

All this while, the Plunger had been drifting on in its own manner.

Suddenly Barney glanced out of the pilot-house window.

And as he did so he gave an awful wild shriek of terror.

There in the darkness he beheld an awful sight.

A dismantled ship of huge proportions loomed up not fifty feet from the Plunger.

It was a battered, storm-driven old wreck of a vessel, whose type was that of the past century.

And at the port-holes and at the rails were ghastly skeleton forms of men.

In daylight this might not have had any effect upon Barney.

But in the night the ship and its skeleton crew were all ablaze with a strange, unearthly light.

All the superstitious terror of the Irishman was aroused.

He certainly believed at the moment that some incarnate spectacle was upon him.

"Och, murther! Shure it's the work of the devil!" he yelled. "Saint Fether preserve us! It's kilt we'll be. An' luk at the fearful loight an' ther awful dead corpses. Howly Mither definud us now!"

Pomp was instantly awakened.

He sprang up out of his chair with a wild yell.

His first sight was that of the luminous drifting wreck.

To say which was the most terrified, the Celt or the darky, would be indeed difficult.

Both were badly struck.

What made the matter worse, as there was no guiding hand at the Plunger's wheel, she now shot forward and alongside the wreck.

Some of the rigging became entangled, and the two vessels were inextricably fouled.

It was a terrifying moment to the two servitors.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LOG OF THE PARADOX.

Born Barney and Pomp ought to have been familiar with the peculiar properties of phosphorus in rotting wood in certain parts of the ocean.

But their superstition was more overruling than their good sense.

The luminous ship was to them something most unearthly.

Words cannot describe their terror.

Leaving everything, they fled shrieking down into the cabin.

Of course everybody on board the Plunger was aroused.

Frank Reade, Jr., came tumbling out of his bunk.

Professor Bookworm and Hayden were also aroused.

Frank made a dash for the deck, fully anticipating some fearful calamity.

For a moment, as he saw how affairs were, he stood spellbound.

He experienced no terror, for he comprehended the situation at a glance.

But the luminous ship and its ghastly freight was to him an object of the deepest wonderment.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" he muttered. "We have run alongside of a curiosity now. What is all this?"

It was now time for Hayden and Bookworm to put in their appearance.

They were equally as amazed as Frank at the apparition.

"Great guns!" gasped Hayden. "What do you call it, Frank?"

"Phosphorus!" answered Professor Bookworm, as Frank hesitated, "truly a very strange but not uncommon phenomenon. I have known many a ship in the Indian Ocean to be ablaze with it, but never before in this part of the world."

"It is very curious!"

"What an ancient type of ship!"

"No doubt she has been drifting in the whirlpool for fifty years or more."

"What a fearful fate for her crew."

Frank sprang into the pilot-house and coming out again turned on the search-light fully.

Its fearful glare plainly revealed every detail in the focus.

Dismantled and ruined, yet wonderfully preserved by the salt air was everything.

At a number of the open ports, as if vainly watching for a sail, were skeletons.

By the rail and in various attitudes about the deck were others.

It was a ghastly and awful sight.

To the voyagers it was intimation of dreadful watching, despair and hopelessness finally merged in death.

"My God!" gasped Hayden, with horror. "What an awful fate for the poor wretches!"

"Awful, indeed!"

"Of what nationality were the crew?"

The brilliancy of the electric light dispelled the luminous phosphorus, and every detail was as plain as day.

All were interested in the drifting hulk and its deep mystery.

Frank at once proceeded to go aboard the wreck.

The Plunger's fastenings to the hulk were made stronger.

The latter seemed to be yet quite seaworthy, and, indeed, in no danger of sinking.

Hayden and Pomp followed Frank aboard the death ship.

A strange scene, indeed, it was which met their gaze.

The broad decks of the ancient vessel were covered with shells and sea drift, as it must have been deposited there in time of storm, for doubtless the waves rolled over the entire vessel.

It was a wonder indeed that so much was in its place.

But the skeletons were seen to be incomplete, and such of them as remained seemed to have been held in place by somewhat rotten lashings.

Grim and ghastly indeed was the scene.

The main mast was broken short off about ten feet above the deck.

But examining it Frank found a dull silver plate which had an inscription upon it.

Thus it read:

"THE PARADOX,

"Built 1720, Liverpool.

"An English ship!" cried Frank. "It cannot be possible that she has sailed these seas ever since."

"It does not follow!" said Hayden. "She may have been in service a hundred years previous."

"That is true," agreed Frank. "Those old time vessels were capable of sailing the seas even two centuries without going to decay. They don't build such ships now."

"I dare say this ship has been rigged many times since then."

"Without doubt."

But Frank was desirous of visiting the cabins.

There he believed he should find evidence of the character of the ship and her crew.

Also of the object and incidents of the cruise.

So he looked for the companionway.
It was just a little aft of the mainmast.
Descending the rotten stairs he entered cabin.
Fortunately the search-light's glare came in through the open ports, making all as light as day.
The sight revealed was a thrilling one.
Upon a couch lay the skeleton of a man.
At a table above which hung a cabin lamp were the skeletons of two others.

Upon the table were charts, a sextant and a quadrant.
All were remarkably well preserved.
It showed that the masters of the ship had been in vain trying to locate their position.

That they had failed to do so was evident.
It was certainly a sad thought.
Frank went to the table and examined the charts.
The lines and figures upon them were rather obscure, yet he was able to trace them quite well.

It was evident that the two men had succumbed to death while in this despairing attempt to solve the mystery of the whirlpool current.
The cabin had been well furnished and there was no doubt a goodly cargo aboard the ship.

But it was easy to divine the fate which had overtaken the crew.
Months of being carried hopelessly onward in the inextricable current had passed by.

The provisions had become exhausted and every source of food supply was next consumed.

The result, of course, was certain death by starvation.

And this had been their fate.

It was a sad thing this terrible fate of the Paradox.

But yet Frank was not satisfied.

He opened one of the drawers to the table and gave a startled cry.

"What is it?" asked Hayden, as he came forward.

"Look!"

Frank took from the drawer quite a large book.

Upon its cover were printed the words:

"LOG OF THE PARADOX.
"Captain Abram Skillings."

The first entry read:

"The Paradox sailed from Liverpool for New York May 20, 1820."

Many pages of minute details of the voyage, but all unimportant, followed. Then followed the account of a violent storm which had driven them far.

"For ten weeks," the journal now read, "we have vainly tacked to the westward. We find it impossible to make progress, and indeed seem to be hopelessly in the power of a certain ocean current, which is carrying us all the while about in a perpetual circle."

"To-day our mate, Ned Foss, bluntly declares that we are in the grip of the Great Maelstrom."

"This means that we shall never see home or friends again, for wind nor sail can never extricate us."

"We must drift on, oh God, forever! Starvation must be our final end—an awful death."

Then followed rambling notes, and a few months later the entry read:

"Still in the clutch of the deadly maelstrom. To-day we opened our last keg of ship biscuits."

"Twenty-four of us there are, and these cannot last long. We have fished in vain and tried to shoot sea gulls."

"To-morrow we shall be for the first time without food."

"God pity us! Fate is against us for a certainty. There is nothing now but death before us. Give us strength and courage to meet it."

"To-day (six weeks later) four died. This leaves only eight of the crew. Three of these are dying. There is no hope for any of us."

"I seem to be holding out better than the others. Perhaps God has meant for me to be the last to die. I pray not."

Two weeks later.

"I have just closed the eyes of Lewis, the supercargo. I am now the only man left on board alive."

"In vain I have tried to get food."

"I can feel myself growing daily weaker, and know that it is a question of but little time."

"Yet I do not fear death. I know that the morrow will mercifully take me out of this career of misery and suffering."

Here the journal ended.

All had listened with interest.

"Golly, Marse Frank," said, Pomp, with dilated eyes, "dat am a dreadful hard way fo' to die."

"You are right, Pomp," said Frank, in reply. "It was a hard fate, indeed."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Hayden. "Is it possible that this old wreck has been drifting about in these waters for more than half a century?"

"So it seems."

"It is incredible."

"Yet we must believe the log."

"It is a circumstance without parallel."

All were fain willing to agree to this. It was now proposed to return to the Plunger.

Nothing more could apparently be gained by remaining aboard the Paradox.

They had learned its history.

It was best to leave it to its fate, still drifting in the great whirlpool.

Some day it would go down.

But better to let it go down of its own accord.

Frank decided to keep the log and a few other articles.

A small sum of money, less than a thousand dollars, in gold, was found aboard.

There might be more, but if so, it was not easy to find.

Leaving the cabin, Frank started for the rail of the ship.

But he had not taken three steps when he came to a startled halt.

There, pinned to the bulwark of the vessel, was a placard.

It was not this alone, but the nature of the inscription upon it which gave Frank a mighty thrill.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SUNKEN SHIPS.

THE inscription upon the placard was a thrilling one.

Frank Reade, Jr., read it.

"My God! will you read that, Hayden?" he said.

The young shipowner had already done so.

His face was as white as chalk. This was what he read:

"N. B.—To whoever shall come aboard the Paradox—This ship was visited in May, 18—, by the crew of the ship Nautilus, derelict, and floating a wreck in the great whirlpool. It may be that our fate shall be the same as the unhappy crew of the Paradox. God forbid! Yet our hearts are sad indeed."

"CAPTAIN PITCHER,

"Of the ship Nautilus,

"Port of New York, U. S. A."

Here was at last the clew to the mystery of the loss of the Nautilus. Frank Reade, Jr., and Hayden exchanged glances.

The expression of Hayden's face had turned to that of joy.

"What do you think of it?" asked Frank, tersely.

"Heaven be praised!" cried the young shipowner. "We now know that the Nautilus is afloat!"

"Yet she is derelict and apt to sink at any time."

"Not more so, perhaps, than the Paradox. We must search the Great Whirlpool until we find her!"

Pomp executed a double shuffle and stood on his head.

Certainly, much had been gained by visiting the Paradox.

It was now in order to return to the Plunger.

Search must at once be made for the Nautilus.

If she was still drifting in the vortex of the Maelstrom she would surely be found.

Yet it might become necessary to travel some few thousands of miles in order to do so.

Back to the Plunger's deck they went.

Once more the submarine boat was got under way after cutting loose from the hull of the Paradox.

The Plunger kept on in the swift current for several days.

In this time no other wreck was seen, nor did any other incident of an exciting sort occur.

Frank was desirous of getting as deeply as possible into the heart of the whirlpool.

For he believed that it was there that he would find the Nautilus if she was yet afloat.

Hayden was positive that she was, and would not listen to any other theory.

One day a new clew was obtained.

The water suddenly seemed to have become filled with driftwood.

There were broken spars, boxes and barrels and various objects.

Suddenly Barney gave a cry and pointed to a floating object.

"Shure, an' phwat the devil do yez call that?"

It was the broken thwart of a boat floating in the current.

And upon it was painted plainly the name:

"Nautilus!"

"Why, it is a piece of a boat from the Nautilus!" declared Frank. Then he paused.

Hayden had turned ghastly pale.

"Upon my word!" he muttered, "this looks like the wreckage of a sunken ship."

"I must confess that it does!" said Frank.

Hayden turned to him.

"Do you think it possible that the Nautilus has sunk?" he asked in a whisper.

Frank hesitated.

"I hardly know what answer to make," he declared. "It is quite likely."

Hayden took a turn up and down the deck.

"It would be in this neighborhood?" he asked finally.

"I should say so."

"Then—then why not make a search to establish the fact?"

"We will certainly do so."

"I wish you would."

Frank stepped into the pilot-house.

He pressed the button which rang the alarm gong.

Everybody rushed into the cabin.

The doors were hermetically shut and the reservoir opened.

The boat began rapidly to sink.

Everybody was agog with excitement and anxious to see the result.

Down the Plunger went.

The depth here seemed very great, and Frank looked at the pressure gauge with some alarm.

The Plunger was especially constructed to stand a large pressure. But she could not stand above a certain point.

She would then be crushed like an egg shell.

The pressure of the water at that awful depth was something tremendous.

But, just as the highest figure on the dial was nearly reached, the boat struck bottom.

Then the search-light rays were sent groping through the gloom.

This revealed an astonishing state of affairs.

Within a radius of a few hundred yards, there were plainly visible the wrecks of three vessels.

Each was a dismantled hulk.

Whether any one of them was the Nautilus, it was impossible to say without a close inspection.

Frank announced this to Hayden, who said:

"How can we overcome that, Frank?"

"Very easily," replied the young inventor.

He called to Barney.

"Barney, bring out those diving-suits from the black chest in the forward cabin."

"All right, sor!" cried Barney.

In a few moments he appeared with Pomp carrying the chest.

It was deposited upon the cabin floor.

Frank swung back the lid and revealed the interior.

There were safely packed in the chest three curious-looking helmets and suits of rubber.

Frank laid these out upon the floor.

Then he began to don one.

"Barney and Pomp, I want you to go with me," he said.

"A'right, sah!" cried Pomp, joyfully.

"We will that!" shouted Barney, beginning to don his suit with alacrity.

In a few moments they were ready.

Hayden approached Frank.

"Are you really going to visit the wrecks?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Frank.

"In diving suits?"

"Yes."

"Why can I not go with you?"

"There are many urgent reasons," replied Frank.

"What are they?"

"In the first place you never had a diving suit on."

"What of that?"

"A good deal."

"Well, what?"

"You could not get about comfortably owing to the enormous pressure. It requires skill and experience to work in a diving suit."

Hayden's arguments were in vain.

Frank would not allow him to don one of the suits.

He and Prof. Bookworm were to await their return patiently.

The diving suits were the invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

They were a wonder in their way.

Upon the back of the wearer was a chemical reservoir, which was capable of generating the purest of air, which permeated the whole body of the suit.

This dispensed with cord or pipe line, and was a great convenience.

Armed with axes and knives the three divers entered the vestibule.

The door leading into the cabin was shut.

Then the outer door was opened, and the water rushed in and filled the vestibule.

The three divers walked out and climbed down from the ship's rail.

They walked slowly across the intervening distance to one of the hulks.

As Frank drew near to it he fancied that it was the Nautilus.

The young inventor experienced a thrill.

He remembered the instructions of Pinkham, the detective, and wondered if he could find the body of Sam Hall aboard the Nautilus.

If so, possibly he might recover the deposition of the witness which was so necessary to save the life of a doomed man in the New York Tombs.

But as he drew nearer to the hulk doubt entered his breast.

The vessel was of too old a type to be taken for the Nautilus.

Indeed, by the electric light on top of his helmet he was able to read the name on the bow of the sunken ship.

Thus he read:

"Vespasian, Havana, Cuba."

The young inventor had no desire to explore the hulk, and motioned the same to Barney and Pomp.

They now approached another.

This seemed to be a vessel of modern architecture, and might possibly be the Nautilus.

Frank drew quite near to it, and looked for the name on the bow.

He read it quickly:

"Rose Thorn, Halifax, N. S."

It was not the Nautilus.

But perhaps the third ship might be identical with it.

So Frank turned to advance toward it.

But as he did so, a most astounding thing happened.

A long arm suddenly shot out from the porthole of the old hulk and encircled him.

Quick as a flash, and before Barney and Pomp could act, he was drawn in through the port.

Out of sight he went in a twinkling.

Dazed with horror the two servitors stood inactive for a moment.

Then they made excited signs to each other.

Grasping their axes firmly they started to Frank's rescue.

But at that instant another long arm shot out of another port and encircled Pomp.

In a flash of time he was also whisked out of sight.

Barney was at a loss how to act.

He was literally like one petrified.

"Howly mither!" he muttered, with a trembling in every joint.

"Shure an' Mither Frank an' the naygur are kilt."

Then a revulsion of feeling came over him.

A sense of desperation caused him to brandish his ax and start to the rescue of his friends.

He knew from the commotion in the water that a struggle was going on in the hold of the vessel.

This was enough.

Barney was determined to rescue them or die in the attempt.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DISTANT LIGHT.

THE brave Celt lost no time in starting for the nearest port-hole.

They were broad and would easily admit of the passage of his body.

He crept through one and as the electric lights illumined the place he beheld what was really a terrible scene.

The entire hold of the ship seemed to be occupied with the hideous body of some strange sea-monster.

The like of this he had never seen before.

It was something of the character of the giant cuttle-fish.

Seeking a home in the hold of the ship it had evidently lived there and fattened upon victims decoyed into the place until it was like a crab in its shell, being unable to get out.

The creature had evidently reckoned the three divers as fat prey and had fastened upon them.

Its long arms were about Pomp and Frank, and it was vainly trying to draw them into its capacious maw.

But it had evidently reckoned without a host.

The divers were making a most determined resistance.

This they were enabled to do with their keen axes.

Blow after blow was dealt the long tentacles of the fish until two of them were severed.

Then Barney appeared upon the scene.

The struggle now soon ended.

With the combined efforts of the three men the cuttle fish was soon killed. But the water was so filled with blood and the strange fluid exuded by the creature that the divers could hardly see.

With common impulse they now hastened to leave the hulk.

A hasty examination satisfied them that none of the three wrecks were identical with the Nautilus.

By signs Frank indicated that they were to return to the Plunger.

Reaching the rail of the submarine boat, they saw Bookworm and Hayden looking out through the windows.

Making signs to them they entered the vestibule.

It was but a moment's work to close the door and turn on the pneumatic valve.

In a few moments the water was entirely pumped out, and the divers went into the main body of the Plunger.

Removing their helmets, they were warmly greeted by Hayden, who inquired eagerly:

"Then none of the ships was the Nautilus?"

"None of them," replied Frank.

"I am glad of that," said Hayden, with a bright smile. "I shall still believe that she is afloat."

"There is little doubt of that," agreed Frank. "I am quite confident we shall find her on the surface."

"So I think."

"There is but one thing yet to be gained by remaining here."

"And that—"

"I want to determine, if possible, the relative action and cause of these revolving currents which cause the great whirlpool."

"Good for you, Mr. Reade!" cried Prof. Bookworm. "You have anticipated my desires."

So the Plunger proceeded to move about cautiously from one spot to another, while with different means Frank tested the currents.

He noted the action of the water upon the grasses and the gravel of the ocean bed.

They seemed bent and washed all in one direction, even as in the bed of a swift flowing river.

The ground seemed to rise gradually upon the one side and descend upon the other.

After a full day of study thus Frank announced his decision:

"I believe that the great whirlpool occupies one huge basin many miles in extent, and that the current is caused by a succession of huge submarine rivers which here unite their waters."

"Wonderful!" cried Prof. Bookworm, noting this down in his book.

"You should be a scientist, Mr. Reade."

"There are, I believe, other causes governed by the land and breezes. The land bordering upon the maelstrom is upon one side high and mountainous, catching the wind from two quarters and sending them back over the sea's surface, almost always in one uni-

form direction, and that in accordance with the mighty current of the maelstrom."

There was certainly logic in Frank's theory.

Prof. Bookworm asserted it as his positive belief that it was true.

"There is no doubt but that you have solved the question, Mr. Reade," he declared. "I shall write many articles upon this for the Scientific World, and your name shall be mentioned."

"You overwhelm me," said Frank, modestly. "I do not deserve anything of the sort."

"It is your just due," insisted the generous professor.

It was now, however, decided to return to the surface.

It was positively believed that the Nautilus would be found afloat.

"I only trust that we may succeed in finding her," declared Hayden.

"We will, if we have to scour every corner of the Whirlpool!" said Frank.

So the Plunger was sent to the surface.

It was an early morning hour when she emerged once more into the air.

The sea was like glass, and not an object of any kind was in view.

For an entire day the Plunger sailed on thus.

It was noticed that the further to the east they went the stronger grew the current.

The reason for this Frank divined was that they were rapidly drawing nearer to the main center or vortex of the revolving body of water.

This was undoubtedly true

But as darkness came on once more the sky began to assume a peculiar leaden hue.

Everybody watched it with curiosity.

"What do you make of it, Frank?" asked Hayden, anxiously.

"Well," replied the young inventor. "It is my candid opinion that it indicates a storm!"

"Whew! it will be a hard one!"

"I fear so!"

"If the Nautilus is derelict it may carry her down!"

"It is possible!"

Hayden anxiously searched the horizon.

"Oh, if she would only come in sight now!" he muttered, "what a happy thing it would be!"

"Fate decrees otherwise!"

"True. Yet this storm will hardly break before morning!"

"No!"

"Then there is hope that we may come up with her in the night."

"Certainly."

It was Pomp's first watch that night.

Hayden could not sleep.

He remained on deck with Pomp until a late hour.

Ever and anon he scoured the sea as best he could by the light of the electric search-light and a night glass.

Hours passed, and finally Barney came on duty.

Still Hayden would not retire.

"Something tells me," he declared, "that the Nautilus will come within the range of our vision to-night."

"Begorra, I hope that same," declared Barney, earnestly, "if only fer yez own sake, me good sor."

"Thank you, Barney," replied Hayden.

Then he gave a start.

He sprang up to his feet with an excited cry:

"Ah," he shouted, "do you see that star of light yonder? See! See! It is a ship's lantern as I live!"

Sure enough, far away in the distant gloom there was a mere speck of light.

It was too dull to be a real star, and was hardly discernible.

It must have been a great distance from the Plunger.

Barney was at once interested.

"Look!" cried Hayden, excitedly. "Can you not see it, Barney?"

"Shure, sor, an' I can that!" replied the Celt.

"It is a ship's lantern. I tell you it is on board the Nautilus. I knew we should come up with her to-night."

"Shure, sor, be aisy," remonstrated Barney, "an' if ye can't be aisy be as aisy as ye kin."

But Hayden had already sprung to the search-light.

He quickly turned it in the direction of the distant light.

Across the sea even to the horizon line shot the brilliant pathway of dazzling light.

Then Hayden placed his powerful night-glass to his eyes.

He could see the light no longer, for the electric glare killed it.

But low on the sea line he saw a black object.

It was hardly visible, but yet it was there, and he felt sure that it was the Nautilus.

Of course, it might be some other vessel adrift in the great whirlpool.

But he would not accept that belief.

"Sound the alarm, Barney!" he cried; "bring everybody on deck. We must take action at once!"

Hayden cast a fearful gaze above.

The sky was black and cloud-hung, and in the zenith there was a rumbling of far distant thunder.

Barney sounded the gong, and in a few moments everybody was on deck.

Some excitement reigned.

Matters were quickly explained.

The Plunger was at once put under full speed.

Everybody was upon the *qui vive*.

Every moment the distant ship drew nearer to view.

Now her hull could be plainly seen in outline against the sky beyond.

Soon, even her stumps of masts could be distinguished.

The search-light revealed all this.

Hayden was the most excited of any.

He walked the deck excitedly.

"We must overtake her!" he cried. "If the storm comes, she will go down!"

Overhead the dull thunder was booming, there was a southing wind which played ceaselessly across the bosom of the tossing sea.

On, faster and faster, went the Plunger.

She gained every moment upon the floating hulk.

Now there seemed to be no doubt that she was the Nautilus.

Sailors were seen upon her deck.

One of them leaned over the rail and shouted through a speaking trumpet:

"Aboy! What craft is that?"

The words, seeming a thousand miles away, reached the hearing of those on the deck of the Plunger.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., replied:

"This is the Plunger, submarine boat, Frank Reade, Jr., master. Who are you?"

There was a moment's lull in the wind, then the reply came back:

"This is the ship Nautilus, from New York, Captain Pitcher."

CHAPTER X.

A D R I F T.

THE excitement created by this reply can hardly be expressed in words.

Hayden fairly danced with joy.

"Run alongside, Frank," he cried, "Get them off as quickly as possible."

This Frank intended to do.

But he never was able to do so.

At that moment there came a terrific gust of wind.

The Nautilus heeled over, a mountainous wave hurled the two vessels apart, then the very pandemonium of the storm burst.

It was with the utmost difficulty that the crew of the Plunger got back into the cabin.

The Plunger seemed standing on end.

Water rushed over her in tons and she would surely have gone down had it not been for promptly closing the hermetically sealed doors.

But it was impossible to penetrate the storm with the searchlight or even tell where they were.

All that could be done was to hold on and keep the Plunger from becoming a hopeless wreck.

Frank would have gone to the bottom with her, but for his fears that some of the crew of the Nautilus might be washed overboard, and need to be picked up.

Hayden was frantic.

He was positive that the Nautilus was lost.

"She will founder, I tell you!" he declared. "She can never out-ride this storm."

However, she could be given no possible relief.

All that the crew of the Plunger could do, was to look out for themselves, and trust to luck.

The storm raged with terrible fury.

It seemed as if the flood gates of Heaven were opened.

Blinding rain literally filled the air in a sheet of water, and the waves ran mountain high.

But the Plunger, unhampered by rigging, rode them like a duck.

It could not be even guessed what was the fate of the Nautilus.

It was feared by all that she would certainly founder, and, indeed, there was good reason for this.

Ever and anon across the inky blackness of the night there would shoot a lightning flash positively dazzling in its brilliancy.

But the storm could not last forever.

After some hours of duration the sky began to clear, the rain ceased falling.

The wind subsided and the waves rolled only in long regular billows.

The cabin doors were now opened and all came out on deck.

The search-light's glare again went out across the tossing waters.

But no twinkling star of light was seen.

No ship's hull was on the broad waste. It seemed that the storm must have separated the two vessels by a wide distance.

Hayden was frantic.

"I tell you we have lost her," he declared. "She is at the bottom of the sea and all those valuable lives are lost."

"Well, if she is at the bottom of the sea," declared Frank Reade, resolutely, "or anywhere adrift upon its surface we will surely find her."

"What good will it do, if she is at the bottom of the sea and her crew dead?" asked Hayden.

"It will do some good," maintained Frank. "We shall find the documents necessary to clear Charles Haynes."

"You are right. That will certainly pay for the effort."

This seemed to calm Hayden greatly. He said little more upon the subject, but continued to watch the sea.

It seemed a long while before daylight finally came.

But when it once more dispelled the darkness, and the sea subsided to almost a dead calm, everybody felt better.

The Plunger now plowed along at a rapid speed.

Suddenly Hayden gave a sharp cry.

"What is the matter?" asked Frank, rushing to his side.

"Look yonder!"

Hayden proffered him the glass.

Frank took it and for awhile studied a small object out upon the wide smooth waste.

"What do you make of it?" asked Hayden after a moment.

"I can hardly say," said Frank, slowly. "Yet it looks to me like a man clinging to a drifting spar."

"Ah, so it did to me!"

"As I live I believe it is."

Of course everybody on board the Plunger was now greatly excited. The boat was headed for the distant object.

As they drew nearer it became almost a dead certainty that it was a man clinging to a spar.

He seemed nearly exhausted, but seemed to gain strength and waved his arms at sight of the Plunger.

Swiftly the submarine boat drew down upon the castaway.

He was seen to be a common sailor, and the storm had nearly deprived him of his clothes.

The Plunger glided near enough for Barney to throw him a rope.

He grasped it and was quickly drawn aboard.

As he came over the rail dripping wet, he sank down upon the deck exhausted.

A glass of brandy, however, quickly revived him.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., said:

"Well, my man, how can you give an account of yourself?"

"All honor to ye, sir!" he replied, tugging his foretop sailor fashion.

"My name is Jamie Brown and I'm able seaman aboard the Nautilus."

"Sure enough!" cried Hayden. "Your name is on our pay rolls."

Say, my fellow, can you tell us of the Nautilus?"

The sailor passed a hand across his brow.

"I make free to say that she is safe an' slick in Davy Jones' locker afore now."

"Then she has gone down?"

"She was broached to an' fillin' when a big wave took me over," replied Brown, truthfully.

Hayden groaned.

"Then of course she is at the bottom of the sea!" he declared.

"And the evidence necessary to clear Charles Haynes," said Frank.

The sailor Brown was closely catechised in regard to the Scotland Yard detective Sam Hall.

He remembered the detective well, and described him fully.

But he could not say what his fate had been.

"I reckon he's along with the others at the bottom," he declared.

Hayden was in despair.

Was this true?

Was Brown the sole survivor of that fearful wreck?

In his despair he turned to Frank.

"What is to be done?" he asked, helplessly.

"I see but one thing," replied the young inventor.

"And that?"

"Is to make a search for the sunken wreck of the Nautilus."

"It will be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"Yes."

"How unfortunate that we could not have met the Nautilus a few hours sooner. I regret the loss of Captain Pitcher. He was an able man and a valuable captain."

"That is true."

"Poor fellow! But do you think it possible to find the wreck?"

"Certainly."

"Let us do so then at once. We can at least find his body."

It was with difficulty that the Plunger was turned against the current of the maelstrom.

Still the powerful electric engines gradually overcame the pressure. Brown, the sailor, of course could give no very intelligible idea of the exact sinking place of the Nautilus.

He had drifted ever since clinging to the spar.

Frank estimated the rapidity of the current in a rough manner.

This was made easier in the fact that during the storm the wind had been against it.

It was estimated that Brown had drifted and had been blown by the wind and current some twenty miles in the time in which he had been in the water.

The ship had doubtless gone down at about the time he was thrown overboard. Therefore it was safe enough to reckon that the ship could be found by returning twenty or more miles.

The Plunger was turned against the powerful current.

It was slow progress.

But gradually the little craft overcame the tremendous resistance.

She covered the distance in something less than six hours.

Then Frank took his bearings carefully.

"I believe the Nautilus went down about here," he declared.

"Heaven grant your surmise may be true," declared Hayden.

Then the reservoir was opened and the Plunger began to sink.

Down she went rapidly.

Eight, ten, twenty, fifty fathoms the indicator registered.

In one hundred and forty fathoms the submarine boat touched bottom.

Then the search-light's rays were sent everywhere over the bed of the sea.

The scene was not unlike that of many another locality they had visited.

There were beds of shifting sand, kelp-strewn rocks and reefs, fishes of various kinds, and other strange sights.

But there was no sign of a wreck.

Vainly the search-light's rays were sent into every corner.

Not a sign of the Nautilus could be seen.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was not discouraged.

He had by no means hoped for such good luck as at once stumbling upon the wreck.

He expected a long search and was prepared for it.

The Plunger now began to grope its way about the ocean bed.

Being elevated a few feet it could easily travel about with careful watch for obstructions.

Some time was thus spent.

Several miles were covered in this manner.

Then suddenly Frank Reade, Jr., who was in the pilot-house gave a loud cry of excitement.

In an instant everybody rushed to the spot.

Hayden was foremost.

"Well, Mr. Reade," he declared. "What is the trouble?"

"As I live!" replied Frank, seriously, "I believe I can see the wreck of the Nautilus this moment."

"Where?"

"Just look yonder!"

CHAPTER XL.

A SUBMARINE SEARCH.

FRANK pointed away through the water to the extremity of the searchlight's rays.

The sight revealed was a most thrilling one.

Certainly the hull of a ship could be seen resting in a bank of sand.

It might not be the Nautilus.

Many a rotting hulk lay under the maelstrom's current.

But Frank clung to the hope that it was the object of their quest. Hayden felt confident.

The Plunger was sent forward at rapid speed.

The distance was soon covered.

And now as they drew near it was seen beyond all doubt that the wreck was that of the Nautilus.

A portion of her side was stove in and she had parted seams fore and aft.

No doubt her sinking had been sudden and terrifying to the crew.

The Plunger was brought to a stop twenty feet from the wreck.

The electric lights sent a flood of radiance over the ship, making all as plain as day.

All was excitement aboard the Plunger.

Frank had finally decided to allow Hayden to accompany him this time.

The diving suits were brought out.

It was decided that only these two men should visit the wreck.

"If possible we must find the body of Hall, the detective," said Frank.

"Certainly."

"We ought to be able to do that."

"If we can only get possession of the deposition papers we are all right."

"At any rate, Mr. Hayden, you have satisfied yourself in regard to the mystery of your ship's fate."

"Yes," replied the young ship owner; "that is a very important point gained, and I am glad of it. No more of my ships will be lost in the maelstrom, be sure."

"I hope not."

"No captain of mine shall ever come so far north again."

By this time the two men were ready for their helmets.

They were adjusted and the chemical air generator regulated.

Then they entered the vestibule.

A few moments later they were in the sea.

It was an easy matter to cross the intervening distance to the Nautilus.

They were equipped with axes and knives, and at once clambered over the rail.

Everything upon the ship's deck presented a scene of general desolation.

Destruction had laid its hand heavily upon rigging and wood work. Indeed it was a hard scene.

Everything was shattered and splintered badly.

Planks were rended and torn up, and there were great seams in the bulwarks of the once stanch ship.

The storm had evidently struck the Nautilus with a fearful force.

But the two divers now approached the entrance to the cabin.

To the mainmast two of the crew were lashed.

They were common seamen, and the expression upon their bloated faces showed that they had died in great agony.

They were the only human beings to be found on the deck.

That there were others in the cabin there was little doubt.

The hatches were tightly battened, and it required some labor on the part of the two divers to lift them.

This was, however, finally done.

Down the cabin stairs they made their way.

Fortunately upon the helmet of each was a small electric light.

These dispelled the gloom of the place.

But both experienced a shock of horror as they entered the cabin.

From a corner there suddenly shot forth a nearly naked human form.

Its arms were extended stiff and rigid in death.

The moving of the currents brought the corpse up until it came in contact with the divers.

The terrible ghastly sight, the corpse's bloated face, hideous, straining eyeballs, all made a scene of horror calculated to daunt the bravest of men.

Frank was the coolest.

Hayden recoiled as the corpse touched him and drifted back.

Then through the water floated other corpses.

They came from every direction, even through the open door of the cabin beyond.

A few yet lay upon the floor, or anchored to the ceiling.

But these same half dozen in number would persist in following the divers about.

After the first chill and novelty had worn off, the two divers became cooler, and went about their duties calmly.

Once Frank put his helmet close to Hayden's, and shouted:

"Hello!"

"Hello, Frank!" replied Hayden.

"I don't see our man here, do you?"

"No!"

Every corpse in the cabin was carefully examined.

But that of Hall could not be found.

If he was on board the ship he was in some other part of it.

Certainly he was not in this cabin.

Satisfied of this Frank went into the next.

Then the fore-castle was visited.

In fact, every part of the ship was closely inspected.

But there was only one verdict to accept.

This was that Sam Hall had not been below decks, nor Captain Pitcher either.

Neither could be found aboard the ship. It was a mystery.

It was easy enough to understand that Captain Pitcher had been on deck and had been washed away.

But the detective would more likely have sought refuge in the cabin.

The most assiduous of search was made.

But not a trace of the two men could be found anywhere.

It was certain that they were not on board the ship.

Here was a mystery.

What did it mean?

Frank Reade, Jr., did some thinking.

If they were not still aboard the ship, it was fair to assume that they had been washed overboard.

And this Frank was prone to accept as a legitimate solution.

He put his helmet close to his companion, and shouted:

"They are not here."

"No," replied Hayden. "What is your opinion?"

"I hardly know."

"They must have been on deck and been washed into the sea."

"Very likely!"

"In that case they will not be easily found!"

This was true.

The two divers were dismayed.

The search was futile.

To look for a sunken wreck was one thing.

But to find the body of a drowned man in all that vast expanse of ocean bed was quite another.

In fact it would seem wholly out of the question.

There seemed no other way but to abandon the quest.

There was plainly no help for it.

Even if the body of Hall was at the bottom of the sea it was not likely that sharks and crabs had left much of it by this time.

It looked as if Charles Haynes must hang.

Again the two divers went over the ship.

But again their efforts were futile.

Hayden secured the money from the safe and the valuable papers in the captain's room.

They had occupied some time in all this.

The pressure was beginning to tell upon Hayden's brain, and it was necessary to return shortly to the Plunger.

Accordingly, Frank again placed his helmet against Hayden's and shouted:

"What do you say? Shall we give the search up?"

"I think we had better," was the reluctant reply.

"Then we will go back to the Plunger now?"

"Yes."

Accordingly, they left the wreck and went back to the submarine boat.

Clambering aboard, they went into the vestibule.

The door was closed, the pneumatic pumps applied, and very soon they were in the cabin.

Removing their helmets, they began a discussion.

It was hard to decide upon the proper move now to be made.

Hayden was extremely loth to give up the hope of finding Hall's body and so was Frank Reade, Jr.

"I think we ought at least to make an effort," he said.

Brown, the sailor, hitched up his trousers, and said:

"I recall now, mates, that the capen an' that detective chap were on the deck of the Nautilus when the storm struck us."

"Then that explains the mystery!" cried Hayden.

"They are certainly at the bottom of the sea."

"Of course."

"If there was only a chance of finding their bodies."

"There is a chance!" said Frank Reade, Jr., "but I must say that it is a very small one."

Hayden looked at Frank.

"I presume it is our best plan to at least make an effort to find them," he said.

"Very well!" replied Frank. "It shall be done."

Accordingly the Plunger was set about the difficult task.

And a difficult one it was, indeed.

It seemed almost impossible to accomplish the object. The area was so vast that it seemed like folly.

However, the attempt was valiantly made.

Suddenly, in groping their way through a small valley, Hayden, who was forward in the turret, gave a loud cry.

"Look out!" he yelled. "We are lost!"

"What is the matter?" shouted Frank Reade, Jr.

"The sea serpent!"

Then all in the submarine boat saw the cause of the alarm.

Down a slope there came gliding a long, sinuous form.

At that distance even, it was tremendous in proportions, its length seeming fully a hundred feet.

It seemed to be making straight for the Plunger.

To all appearances it was a monster serpent, and the terror of the voyagers was most infinite.

CHAPTER XII.

A BATTLE UNDER WATER.

But Frank Reade, Jr. was the coolest of all.

He very quickly defined the nature of the new foe.

A wild cry went up from the rescued sailor Brown.

"The sea serpent, by jingo!" he yelled. "It's all up with us!"

"Heavens!" gasped Hayden, with cold perspiration oozing from every pore. "What a monster!"

"Golly fo' glory," yelled Pomp. "Dis chile don' wan' no pahnt ob snakes. Jes' go fo' de surface, Marse Frank, as quick as eber yo' can."

"Begorra, it's kilt we'll all be!" screamed Barney.

Prof. Bookworm only shrugged his shoulders and regarded the monster intently.

"If that is really the sea serpent," he muttered, "then the great mystery which has so long baffled science is solved."

But Frank Reade, Jr. brought the Plunger to a stop.

"Don't get excited," he said, coolly. "Nobody will get hurt. I'll fix that chap pretty quick."

Frank had seen quickly enough that it was no snake whatever.

Indeed, it was only a giant eel of a species which live only at great depths in the ocean.

They are a species which rarely come to the surface.

Those well informed on the subject connect the fabled sea serpent seen by so many voracious sea captains with a specimen of this deep sea monster.

Frank had no idea whatever of the giant eel's disposition.

It might attack the boat, and again it might not.

Doubts upon this score, however, were quickly settled.

The eel's sinuous folds glided down the steep.

Then suddenly it paused.

"It's broad head, with its wide mouth bristling with fine teeth, was raised high in the water."

It seemed to be studying the Plunger intently.

For a few moments it remained in this position.

It was a time of suspense for the voyagers.

But suddenly it changed its position, and seemed to hover for a moment over an object in the sand.

Then the voyagers were rewarded with a thrilling sight.

It was one calculated to try the strongest nerves.

Down went the eel's jaws.

When it uplifted its head, it was seen to hold an object in them.

As the voyagers saw what this was, they were almost petrified with horror and amazement.

"My God! Do you see that?"

"What is it?"

"It is—I tell you it is a man!"

Certainly it was the corpse of a human being which the eel held in its capacious jaws.

One moment it held the dead man aloft.

Then with a gulping motion it disappeared entire down the monster's throat.

After swallowing it, it buried its head in the sand and remained motionless.

This was probably the method it employed of digestion.

For some moments the witnesses of this scene stood transfixed with horror.

Then Hayden turned a livid face to Frank.

"Did you see that?"

"Yes."

"What do you think?"

"I hardly know."

"Well, upon my word, I believe that was either Pitcher or Hall."

"It may be so."

That they should conclude that this was the truth seemed a very reasonable hypothesis.

But Hayden was not satisfied.

"If that is Hall," he said, "why can we not recover the body?"

Frank looked surprised.

"The eel has swallowed it," he said.
 "True, but he has not mutilated or digested it."
 "No."
 "Then why not recover the body?"
 "You mean to kill the eel and cut it open?"
 "Yes."
 Frank studied the monster's position a moment.
 "That is not going to be an easy matter!" he declared.
 "What can we do then?"
 The young inventor seemed to receive a sudden inspiration.
 "I have an idea!" he cried. "On the whole you are right, Hayden. We must kill the eel."

Frank caused the Plunger to draw back a distance of a hundred yards from the eel.

Then he procured three heavy and very sharp axes.
 "Barney and Pomp," he said, "I am going out there to try and kill the eel. If you want to go with me you may. It will be a dangerous undertaking and may cost us our lives. You have the choice."

Only one moment did the two servitors hesitate.
 Both were intensely afraid of the reptile tribe.
 To them the eel was the equivalent of a huge snake.
 But the coveted opportunity to go with their master upon an undertaking, no matter how hazardous prevailed.

"Begorra. I'm wid yez to the death, Misther Frank."
 "I am jes' gwine wif yo' an' no mistake, Marse Frank."
 This settled it.
 In vain Hayden pleaded for permission to go.
 If he had gone, one of the others would have been obliged to stay behind.

Frank preferred to have his two faithful servitors with him.
 Hayden and Brown and Prof. Bookworm were to remain behind.
 The professor advanced and laid a hand on Frank's arm.
 "Mr. Reade!" he said.

"Well?"
 "Science demands that you recover at least the skull if not the entire skeleton of that monster."

"You shall have the skull!" replied Frank, earnestly.
 In a few moments the three adventurers had donned the diving armor.
 Then armed with axes they left the Plunger.

To attack a monster eel fully one hundred feet in length in one hundred and forty fathoms depth of water was by no means a light undertaking.

The weapons which they were to use were certainly primitive.
 But the habit the eel had of burying its head in the sand to aid digestion, Frank believed was favorable.

It would enable them to approach the monster unseen.
 Then perhaps a lucky blow upon the neck might disintegrate the spinal column and kill the monster.

If so, the battle would be quickly won.
 Leaving the Plunger the three men boldly approached the giant.
 Those on board the Plunger watched them intently.

It was a thrilling moment.
 But the eel suddenly moved.
 However, it was only to bury its head more deeply.

Its gullet could be seen in its distension and the act of digesting its morsel of food.

Nearer the three divers drew to the eel.
 He evidently did not note their approach. If he did, he did not pay any special heed to it.

Now they stood over the monster.
 The narrow part of its body near the head was the point Frank desired to strike.

He motioned to Barney and Pomp.
 All raised their axes.
 There was a moment of hesitation.

Then down they came.
 Twice they rose and fell, each time being buried to the shoulder in the monster's hard flesh.

The effect was thrilling.
 Up from the sand came the eel's head with the first blow.
 But it quickly fell.

The second blow had certainly cut the vertebra. The head fell but the huge body rose in terrible contortions.

A fearful wave lifted the three assailants from their feet.
 They were hurled with frightful force against a reef.

Here, however, they clung desperately, while the terrific commotion in the water threatened to kill them with the force of the concussion against their helmets.

The result would have been serious, certainly, if the eel had not had its contortions quieted by loss of blood.

Coiled in great heaps, it lay in a death stupor.
 The Plunger had been tossed rather roughly about, but no harm was done.

It was certainly a moment for mutual congratulations.
 The monster eel was dead, and the three plucky assailants escaped unhurt, save a few bruises.

All three now rushed forward and cut the eel's head completely off.
 Barney carried it to the Plunger's deck for preservation, at the request of Prof. Bookworm.

Those on board the Plunger were delighted at the result.
 They clapped their hands and shouted with great applause.

But the three divers, of course, could not hear them, though they could see them through the Plunger's plate glass windows.

Frank now produced a sharp knife and proceeded to dissect the eel. This was no easy task.

Its flesh was extremely hard and its skin very tough.
 However, after some effort he managed to rip open a part of its throat, and soon had reached the apex of the stomach.

Here a startling sight was revealed.
 A man's leg came to view. Then another leg and the entire body dropped out.

There were other things in the eel's belly, such as large fishes and crabs. But Frank did not examine further.

As the corpse fell out upon the sand he hastily surveyed it.
 Then he experienced a thrill of disappointment most keen.

It was that of a middle-aged man, tall and strong built.
 But he had on the habiliments of a sailor, and evidently was a man of the lowest class.

Frank was disappointed.
 It had been a futile quest, for this was not the body of Hall, the detective.

CHAPTER XIII.

FOUND—THE END.

FRANK READE, JR., was more disappointed than words can tell.
 He was positive that the man swallowed by the shark was either Pitcher or Hall, the detective.

It was neither.
 That the man was one of the crew of the Nautilus as washed from the deck there was no doubt.

Frank motioned to Barney and Pomp, and the return to the deck of the Plunger was made.

No sooner had they passed through the vestibule than those in the cabin surrounded them.

Frank removed his helmet.
 He saw Hayden's questioning gaze.
 He shook his head.

"No," he said, "it was neither of them."
 Hayden was plainly disappointed.

"You don't mean it!" he exclaimed. "Well, that is too bad. What shall we do?"

"Continue the search."
 "It is useless."

"I think so myself."
 "Let us return home."

It was plain that Hayden had given up all hope.
 But the quest was pursued for several days longer.

Then it was unanimously agreed that all had been done that was possible. There was no other way but to return home.

So the Plunger rose to the surface and began the long battle with the current of the maelstrom.

Several times the crew almost gave up in despair in their efforts to get out of the current.

Even while they were yet in it a startling incident occurred.
 Hayden had a great habit of still studying the sea with a glass.

One day he saw an object far to windward.
 "I tell you, Frank," he declared, "it is a mass of wreckage, and there are two men upon it."

This created a tremendous excitement. At once the Plunger was headed for the distant object.

As they drew nearer it became certain that there were two men upon the drifting pile.

Signals were exchanged, and when within one hundred yards of the castaways a wild cry burst from Hayden's lips.

"God be praised!" he shouted. "It is Pitcher and Hall."
 Ten minutes later the two survivors of the Nautilus were safely aboard.

Their explanation was simple.
 Washed overboard they had for four days, without food or drink, clung to this mass of wreckage.

Drifting thus in the maelstrom their fate had seemed sealed. But hoping against fate they had bravely clung there.

The joy of all was most intense. The surprise of the castaways at the appearance of the Plunger was great.

When they learned that their rescuers had visited the wreck of the Nautilus at the bottom of the sea they were even more amazed.

But their troubles were now practically at an end.
 It seemed that they were to be numbered among the very few who have returned from the powerful currents of the maelstrom.

For days the brave little Plunger fought with the powerful current.
 Then the outer circle was passed, and once more the open sea was reached.

Six weeks they had passed in the Great Whirlpool.
 Safely they arrived home at last.

The story they told was a wonderful one.
 Prof. Bookworm gained glory among the scientists.

Detective Sam Hall arrived just in time to save Charles Haynes from the scaffold.

Hayden returned to his business with the determination that his ships should thereafter shun the neighborhood of the maelstrom.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp returned to Readstown with the Plunger.

But the young inventor did not settle down to a life of ease after this.
 He had already upon his mind the details of a new and wonderful invention, which we may be permitted to describe to the reader in a future story.

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